

### **March 28, 2021 Palm Sunday Homily:**

A most significant, though often neglected detail, in Saint Mark's account of the Passion and death of the Messiah is his silence. In particular, the Evangelist calls attention to the silence of Jesus during the religious and political trials.

Let us return to Mark's narrative. "The High Priest, Caiaphas, rose before the assembly, and questioned Jesus, saying, 'Have you no answer? What are these men testifying against you?' But he was silent and answered nothing." (Mk. 14:60-61) Clearly the High priest was annoyed by the silence of Jesus, a silence which the early Christians found foretold in a prophecy of Isaiah concerning "the Suffering, righteous servant".

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like the lamb led to the shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." (Is. 53:7)

Jesus' silence reappears in the Roman trial. "Again Pilate questioned him. 'Have you no answer? See how many things they accuse you of.' Jesus gave no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed." (Mk. 15:4-5) Jesus gave Pilate the silent treatment. He said not a word when Pilate pronounced his death sentence over him.

Jesus dominated the two trials by his silence. Even on the cross, Jesus speaks briefly, quoting words from the Twenty-Second Psalm: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." (Mk. 15:34) Yes, the silence of Jesus is striking. There is no dialogue, no debate and no argument. His silence speaks louder than words. It is as if God speaks to us through his deafening silence.

But how do we account for it?

The heart of Jesus is filled with a profound and unshakeable trust in God. He is intent in carrying out the mission entrusted to him to the bitter end. "Not my will but yours be done" (Mk. 14:36), avowed Jesus. Imagine, if only for a moment, how each of us would react if, as an innocent person, our very life was at stake. Would we be silent and serene, or would we protest loudly? Our emotions would likely come into play: fear, rage, tears of sorrow and bewilderment. Why am I on trial for a crime I did not commit? In her profound reflections on Saint Mark's account of Jesus' Passion, the Swiss mystic and medical doctor, Adrienne von Speyr, writes,

"A Christian attitude can say infinitely more in silence than in speaking".

All of us together should always remember in our small and great difficulties, and also in our joys, that this attitude of silence exists, and it comes from the Lord and often warns us not to let ourselves be drawn into unnecessary, rash and inappropriate words that do not mirror the Lord's words and reflect his image. Silence can be a powerful weapon. Jesus used it most effectively during the drama of his Passion. It proved to be intimidating to his detractors.

So, too, many of the great Christian martyrs have chosen to be silent in the face of certain torture and death. A couple of years ago, twenty Coptic Christians were taken captive by the agents of the terrorist

group, I.S.I.S. in Egypt. Attired in orange jumpsuits, the condemned prisoners showed remarkable fortitude and did not utter a single word until seconds before they were executed, when they each whispered the words, "Lord Jesus".

What about us? I suspect we'll never know until we are each faced with our own passion. If that hour should come, let us pray that God grant us the grace to bear witness to the courage, patience and determination of the silent Christ in the last moments of our life.

Amen!